



# Interviews

## Interviews

In all interviews, as in all aspects of your job application, employers look for relevant skills, (both generic and technical) and academic achievement. Generally, interviews focus on you 'soft' or generic skills, such as teamwork, leadership, communication, problem solving and the like. Ideally, you will be able to discuss these with real life examples from involvement in your university course, employment (paid or voluntary), sport, hobbies, clubs and societies. The more varied your range of experiences the better.

### An interview is a performance

Interviews are not only about what you can do but how well you can present it. An interview often selects the person who appears to be the best person for the job, rather than the person who is the best person for the job.

## Preparing for the Interview

### Be able to talk about yourself

Your task in the interview is to convince employers that:

- Your abilities, work style and values match the job. To do this you need to be able to talk about yourself clearly with real examples of your work
- You want this job (not any job)

### Research the organisation:

- Read the position description
- Know something about the job/products/services/clients

The following quotes highlight the need to prepare before your next interview.

- Spectacular performance is always preceded by unspectacular preparation
- If you fail to prepare, prepare to fail
- Preparation compensates for lack of talent
- Preparation doesn't take time, it saves time

## Different styles, formats and locations of interviews

Every interview will involve at least some of the following styles, formats and location.

### Interview styles

- **Behavioural interviews**  
Employers often consider the best predictor of future performance to be past behaviours. On this basis the interviewer will ask a series of detailed questions about your past experiences in areas relevant to the competencies and attributes required for the job. For these interview it is important to prepare a variety of stories and experiences which demonstrate your ability to meet the selection criteria. Currently, this is a very popular style of interview question.
- **Situation interviews/role-plays**  
You may be asked to demonstrate your skills in a role-play that mimics an important aspect of the actual position. This will test your ability to problem solve and think outside the square.
- **Structured interview style**  
The interviewer works from a rigid list of questions. This type of interview can often feel stilted as it is a question and answer situation rather than a conversation. The advantage of this format is that all interviewees are asked the same questions, so they'll be judged against the same criteria. The main disadvantage is lack of flexibility. Individual differences can be overlooked.
- **Unstructured interview style**  
Some employers will want a casual and conversational style in the interview and ask broad questions only. This type of interview gives greater scope to bring out the interviewee's personality, and gives the interviewee opportunities to lead the conversation.
- **Stress interview style**

The interviewer may be deliberately rude or inappropriate to test how you will respond. They want to see if you have a "short fuse" or whether you can handle inappropriate behaviour. This is sometimes done if the employer believes you will be in this situation in your job, e.g. you may need to deal with angry customers. This type of interview has not been popular for many years. Currently role-plays are more commonly used to test your customer service skills with difficult clients.

### Interview formats

- **One-on-one interviews**  
An interview with you and one interviewer.
- **Panel interviews**  
Panel interviews are used by companies to enable a number of people to meet with you. While the panel interviews can be more daunting, they usually result in a more balanced assessment as you have the judgement from several interviewers rather than one. Interviewers may take turns in asking you questions on different areas. You will need to establish rapport with the whole interview panel, not just the person who asks the most questions. If this is difficult, first direct your response to the person asking the question and then make eye contact with at least one other member on the interview panel.
- **Group interview**  
You may be interviewed with other candidates. The purpose of this type of interview is to determine some of the characteristics of how you act with other members of a group and for the economy of evaluating several candidates at the same time. When researching a company try and determine some of the characteristics they want. In a group interview you must contribute to the discussion without cutting other people off.

### Interview Locations

- **Employers offices/Recruitment agency offices**  
Interviews at an office are the most common place for an interview
- **University campus**  
Interviews conducted by recruiters on campus are primarily for final year and IBL students
- **Restaurant**  
Interviews over a meal are often included if your future position will involve some form of entertaining/rapport building. In a lunch

interview order food that you are familiar with and is easy to handle, and limit the amount of alcohol you consume.

- **Telephone**

Usually a telephone interview is used for the initial screening to roughly and quickly determine your basic communication skills, or perhaps to clarify one aspect of your application. Alternatively, employers may conduct in-depth telephone interviews when time is critical and distance is an issue. Since the interviewer cannot see you, it is important to speak clearly and professionally. Should the phone call take you by surprise, be sure you are in a situation to concentrate on the call; you may need to ask them to call back in ten minutes. A telephone call from the interviewers has become more frequent with the increase of mobile phone ownership.

### A Typical interview structure

- Meet and greet
- Interviewer gives brief explanation of the job
- Interviewer may outline the philosophy/nature of the organisation
- Question from the interviewer/s
  - Icebreaker
  - General questions on your skills and experience
  - Behavioural interview questions
  - Scenario
- Questions from the interviewee
- Closure

### Non-verbal behaviour

Your appearance often leaves as big an impression as what you say. No one is expecting you to look like a model from a magazine or wear designer clothes, but they will expect some basics. It is your best interest to conform to the following:

- SMILE!!!
- Good posture at all times (both sitting and standing)
- Eye contact
- Strong hand shake
- Don't fidget
- Dress appropriately
  - Usually it is best to take out the face piercing, and avoid jingly jewellery, black nail polish, revealing clothes, etc
- Look and smell clean
  - But go easy on the perfume/aftershave

- No scuffed shoes or stains on clothes

### **Interview "do's and Don'ts "**

Given the range of interview styles, interviewer's personalities and situations available, every interview is a unique experience. You will need to use all your discretion to decide what is appropriate to say in your interview. However some suggestions are appropriate for most of the interview you will attend.

#### **DO'S:**

- Find out about the company and position you are applying for (at a minimum know about their products and services, if possible read their mission statement, vision, values and the like)  
Read the selection criteria and position description (if they exist)  
You need to show you have accurate and realistic expectations regarding the job.
- Be prepared to discuss your skills and background.  
Come prepared with your real life stories that illustrate your relevant skills and successes.
- Arrive on time
- Use the interviewer's name/s throughout the interview.
- Be aware of your body language. Sit upright, look alert and interested at all times. SMILE
- Answer the question asked (even if it is about unfavourable things in your background)
- Have the question clarified if it is not clear
- Have questions to ask the interviewer, prepare them before the interview. Remember an interview is a two-way process. (See end for more examples)
- Project confidence and enthusiasm
- Speak clearly. Poor diction and grammar don't project competence
- Know your market value and be prepared to specify your required salary range, should you be asked
- At the end of the interview thank the interviewer for their time.

#### **DONT'S**

- Answer questions with a simple yes or no, you need to elaborate whenever possible. On the other hand don't over answer questions, there needs to be a balance.
- Be overbearing, conceited or a know it all, on the other hand you can't be too modest. Again, there needs to be a balance.
- Make derogatory remarks about your present or former employer, manager or lecturer, it makes YOU seem negative, a gossip and difficult to get along with.
- Limit your questions you ask the interviewer to those about remuneration (salary, holidays, bonuses etc) You don't want to give the impression you are only interested in your needs, not those of the employer
- Smoke before or during an interview, chew gum
- Lie

#### **What will employers be looking for?**

Surveys indicate that the most sought after aspects of a prospective employee relate more to attitudes and enthusiasm than technical skills. The following is a list of employers' wish lists when selecting the ideal employee. Do keep in mind that a "wish list" is exactly that, it is a type of ambit claim made by employers, containing everything they could hope for in an employee. Employers know that the reality is; it is unusual for any applicant to have every attribute an employer can wish for. A detailed list of employer expectations can also be found in section "2.4. What are Assessors Looking For"

#### **Employer wish list**

- Realistic expectations
- A confident/positive attitude
- Motivation/ambition
- Hard working/energetic
- A willingness and capacity to learn new skills and procedures
- Flexibility
- Communication skills (written, oral and aural)
- Interpersonal skills
- Initiative
- Analytical ability and good judgment
- Planning and organisation skills
- Persuasiveness
- Attention to detail
- Leadership potential
- A broad knowledge base
- Work experience
- Capacity for cooperation and team work
- Capacity to make decisions and solve problems

- The capacity to work with limited supervision
- Ability to control information
- Goal orientation
- Ability to meet objectives

### The interviewer's top ten fears

Whilst being interviewed is a stressful event, remember that the person asking the questions also has concerns about the outcome of the interview and may not have confidence in their interviewing skills. The interviewer is responsible for selecting the best candidate for the position, and not selecting someone inappropriate for the position. The interviewer's top ten concerns often include the following; that you will:

- Not be able to do the job (that you lack the necessary skills and qualifications)
- Be disloyal and seek to undermine your superior
- Not put in a full day or will be frequently absent if hired
- Pursue your own agenda and be unreceptive to guidance
- Only say long enough to find something better
- Not get along with other employees
- Do the minimum required, not the maximum of which you are capable
- Be a drone and not show any initiative
- Be disruptive, dishonest or a stirrer
- Bring discredit to the interviewer or company

### Major warning signs an interviewer looks for

- Any signs of dishonesty or lying
- Any signs of irresponsibility or aggressiveness
- Any signs of tardiness or inability to meet work commitments
- Lack of willingness to be managed
- Complaining or blaming things on others
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of enthusiasm for the company and its goal
- Signs of instability or inappropriate responses
- 

### Behavioural interview question - general background

Most employers today now include at least one "Behavioural Interview Question" when interviewing and the trend is growing stronger amongst HR professionals. Behavioural interview questions are based on the assumption that your past behaviour is the best predictor of your future behaviour. In other words, if an employer wants to know how you'll respond to a future situation in their company, he or she can get a good indication by finding out how you've responded to similar past situations.

In preparation for these questions the interviewer will have decided on the exact competencies they are looking for. Competencies are measurable and

objective behaviours. Examples include: communication skills, commitment to task; dealing with ambiguity; decision making; leadership skills' group skills, problem solving; and so on.

In preparation for these questions, you the interviewee will need to develop brief factual examples from your past, highlighting the competencies the interviewer will be looking for. Discussing these examples or stories will be much easier if you've thought about them ahead of time and you don't have to "wing it" during the interview. You can usually find the competencies which will be covered in the interview listed in the position description, job advertisement or in the general literature/web site provided by the company.

For each story or example, you intend to introduce, make sure you can cover the following three specific areas:

1. The **Situation** or the **Task** you had to perform. Be able to:
  - a) Describe a situation or problem you have encountered and the context
  - (b) Describe the task you understood and your ideas for solving the problem
2. The **Action** you took in response to the situation or task. Be able to:
  - a) Describe the steps you took
  - b) Obstacles that you had to overcome
3. The **Results** or **Outcome** of your actions. Be able to:
  - a) Highlight outcomes achieved

You can use the acronym **STAR** (situation, task, action, result) or **SAO** (situation, action, outcome) to remember these story elements, each of which the interviewer will be looking for specifically.

Some interviewers will prompt you through each stage of the series of questions. However, some employers will introduce you to all aspects of the question and then leave you to answer it yourself. In the second scenario, the employer is usually looking to see if you naturally complete the story and discuss the results and outcomes. Most employers make the assumption that people with a business orientation will always include outcomes and results (the bottom line) as a part of a complete retelling of an event. They will assume that people with an academic orientation will be more concerned with the process (situation, tasks, and actions) than the outcome/results. Employers want a business approach, so do include all aspects of the event including the outcomes.

When discussing the situation or task the interviewer will want a real and specific example including activities, dates and names. Ensure that your facts are correct as some employers will go on to do reference

checks to validate the specific situations, events and examples that you provide

### Popular interview questions

You should try to answer the following 21 popular questions out loud! Answer them in front of a mirror and/or with a friend/ family member whose opinion you trust.

1. Tell us about yourself
2. What do you like to do in your spare time?  
Tell us about an interest or hobby that you enjoy.
3. What do you like to read? Tell us about a book, newspaper or magazine article you have read recently.
4. In what kinds of jobs are you most interested?
5. What are the most important considerations for you in choosing a job?
6. Is your study performance an indication of your ability in this job?
7. Please outline any previous work experience.
8. Why did you choose your course?
9. Which one of your subjects have you found most interesting so far? What have you learned?
10. Tell us about your weaknesses.
11. How do you operate under pressure?
12. If we were your manager, how would we get the best out of you?
13. Aren't you overqualified for the job?
14. Tell me about a time you failed to complete a project on time, despite your best efforts? What did you do to fix the situation? What was the outcome?
15. Tell me about a time when you had to work as part of a team and you had a team member who wasn't being very cooperative or productive. What did you do to help rectify the situation? What was the result?
16. Sometimes adjusting to change can be very difficult. Can you think of a specific time when you needed to adapt to change and what steps you took in order to be successful at it? What was the outcome?
17. Describe the biggest problem you have solved in the past year. How did you handle it? What was the result?
18. Tell me about a time when you effectively led a group? How did you do this? What was the result?
19. There are many examples of inappropriate questions e.g.:- "How old are you? Or which political party do you plan to vote for in the next election
20. Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to add to your application?

21. Thank you for answering our questions.  
Before we finish, do you have any questions you would like to ask us?

### Some questions to ask in an interview:

- How would a typical day be spent in the job?
- What will be the greatest challenge in the job?
- What induction/initial training is available?
- What staff training and development is available?
- Does the organisation encourage further study?
- Are there performance standards which must be met?
- Who evaluates my performance? What criteria are used? How often would I be appraised?
- What is the possible career path structure open to me?
- What are the conditions of employment?
- Reporting relationships, i.e. to whom will I be responsible?
- Could you explain the organisational structure?
- What are the management styles?
- Will I be working alone or in a team? Describe the team.
- How do you see the future of this industry?
- How have other people handled this position?
- What did they do well?
- Why is this position available?
- What has happened to the previous occupant of this job?
- Is this a newly created position?
- How many employees are there in the department?
- Are there impending technological or organisational developments which may affect the work?
- Is taking responsibility encouraged? If so, in which areas, by which methods, when appropriate?
- May I have a look at the work environment?
- What is the organisation's attitude towards .....?
- How are priorities established?
- When will you be making your decision?

### Some questions to avoid

Avoid only asking questions about the pay and conditions as this will leave the employer with the impression that you are only interested in this aspect of the job. You need to build on information given to you, don't ask questions which have been covered in the interview, employer home page or employer brochures.

### Finishing off the interview

Ask about the next stage in the selection process, agree on who should take the initiative for the next contact, schedule a call-back time. In your concluding comments, you may want to allay any interviewer concerns by covering the following three points:

- You are really interested in the job
- You will do great work
- You won't let your employer down

For example you could say – "I am very keen to be given an opportunity to demonstrate my capabilities and enthusiasm for the work". Naturally, the wording has to be yours; you need to feel comfortable with what you say.

## **ALWAYS THANK THE INTERVIEWER FOR THEIR TIME!**

Additional interview questions to practice your motivation to work in this organisation.

- Why did this position appeal to you?
- Why would you like to work for our organisation?
- What interests you about our products or services?
- What do you want to be doing in your career five years from now? Why?
- How long would you stay with the company?
- How long would it take you to make a contribution?
- What do you think determines a person's progress in an organisation?
- Have you ever had any part-time or vacation employment or previous experience in this field?
- What's on your shopping list for your first job?

### **Your motivation to work in this career**

- Why did you choose this career?
- What are you looking for in a job?
- What are your major motives for working?
- How ambitious are you?
- What subjects caused you most difficulty? How did you overcome this problem?
- Is this career your one option at this stage? If not, what other types of career interest you?
- Which jobs/assignments did you enjoy most? Why?

### **Your skills and abilities**

- Tell me about your self
- Why should I hire you?
- Can you recommend from your previous employers? What would they say about you?
- What have you learned from some of the jobs/assignments you have held?
- What is your major weakness? What have you done about it?
- What are your greatest strengths?

- Have you ever done any public speaking. What feedback did you get?
- How good are your listening skills?
- What qualities do you perceive as necessary to be successful in your field? Do you have those qualities?
- What entrepreneurial activities have you been involved in?
- How do you ensure that your work is of the highest standard?

### **Your working style**

- Under what conditions do you work best?
- Can you work under pressure?
- How do you handle stress?
- How can you tell when you are stressed?
- How do you plan your daily activities?
- Tell me about an experience in your career that really changed you
- How do you define doing a good job?
- How have you benefited from your disappointments?
- What does teamwork mean to you?
- What is your idea of a good leader?
- What leadership qualities do you think are important?
- Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?
- Provide examples of difficult decisions you have made in recent times. Why were they difficult?

### **Behavioural questions**

- Tell me about a situation in which your work was criticized. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- All jobs have their frustrations and problems. Describe some examples of specific job conditions, tasks or assignments that have been dissatisfying. Why?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to influence positively the actions of others in a desired direction?
- What have you done which demonstrates initiative and willingness to work?
- Tell me about a really good team you have worked in. What part did you play in its success?
- Tell me about a time when you had to alter your priorities with little or no notice due to changing demands? What did you do?
- Tell me about a time where you were able to effectively motivate your team. How did you do this?